Introduction
During these globally challenging times, it is more important than ever to protect the health safety and livelihoods of workers in our global supply chains, and this series of 8 webinars is designed to help support this process.

The webinars have been sponsored as a collaboration between 10 UK Supermarkets (Aldi, ASDA, Co-op, Lidl, Morrisons, M&S, Ocado, Sainsburys, Tesco and Waitrose & Partners). Through these supplier-facing webinars we aim to provide support and guidance for managing COVID-19 related issues specifically, to protect workers during this period of unprecedented change. We have now completed eight webinars in this programme, and this summary covers webinar eight.

Webinar Purpose
The session will provide an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the risk of labour exploitation globally and the recruitment risks this creates for businesses. Through case studies from suppliers and civil society organisations in countries including the UK, Spain, Thailand, the United States and South Africa, we will explore what businesses can do to tackle the increasing risk of labour exploitation and create robust, resilient recruitment channels. There will also be an opportunity for questions and answers.

The slides for this webinar can be accessed here
The recording of this webinar can be accessed here

These can be shared with those that registered for the webinar as well as sponsors, suppliers, partners and colleagues.

We would like to hear your feedback – access the survey here:

Webinar Presenters
- Louise Herring – Herring Consultancy
- Chloe Cranston, Anti-Slavery International
- Rachel Dickens – Stronger Together, Programme Manager UK
- Evan Cupido – Stronger Together, Programme Manager South Africa
- Jhon Munoz – Stronger Together, Programme Manager Spain
- Veronica Ospina - Stronger Together US Program Associate
- Justine Currell - Executive Director, Unseen
- Ohnmar Ei Ei Chaw (Chaw Chaw), Country Director (Myanmar), Issara Institute
- Ana Maria Soto, Regional Program Manager, Empowerment, Issara
- Paul McAnulty, Compliance Investigation Manager, Staffline
- Hannah Newcomb, Managing Director (allianceHR) – Fast Forward and Responsible Recruitment
- Clare Clifton, Sustainable Sourcing & Ethical Trade Manager, World Wise Foods
- Andy York, Responsible Sourcing Manager, Tulip

Key Points

Labour exploitation overview
• By definition, **labour exploitation ranges** in **type** and **severity** from underpayment of wages/ unsafe living and working conditions to, in its most extreme form, forced labour

• The **crime of human trafficking** is linked to labour exploitation via the movement and control of people for the purposes of exploitation

• Within labour exploitation, we know that the **control** of accommodation, transport, employment and wages are key factors

• **Workers may not be aware that they are being exploited**

• **Exploitation** is possible wherever there is **demand for labour** and **COVID-19 has created demand for labour** because of restrictions on movement, particularly the movement of migrant workers who, for example, would normally be moving across national borders to work in agriculture

• **Exploitation is a lucrative form** of income for the exploiter who preys upon workers vulnerability

• Exploitation is a business model which adapts to attempts to stop it

• We know that exploitation in some sectors, e.g. car washing, in the UK has been disrupted by COVID-19 leading exploiters to attempt to move the workers they control into other sectors

• **COVID-19 has created and exacerbated people’s vulnerability globally whether that be through restrictions on movement or through economic hardship.**

**Global labour exploitation overview and key factors**

• Anti-Slavery International Report **Leaving No-One Behind** emphasises the impact of COVID-19 on forced labour globally which has been to:
  o Make those already in slavery-like conditions face new and increasing risks and abuses
  o Created economic disruption which is increasing poor individuals’ and communities’ vulnerability to forced labour
  o Worsen discrimination
  o Increase risks for migrant workers
  o Disrupt anti-slavery efforts – whether non-governmental organisations or state activities

• Important to consider the viewpoint of the ILO that “**Forcing vulnerable workers with little choice but to endure conditions that put them at risk, including by dismantling previously established labour rights, can constitute a form of forced labour**”

• **COVID has created increased demand for certain products and put pressure on supply chains resulting in hazardous conditions for workers and opportunities for unscrupulous recruiters. Risk is present in many agricultural products.**

• **We should expect to see more people pushed into precarious employment and exploitation – with debt bondage a particular risk – as a result of disruption to demand, impact on livelihoods and risk of mass unemployment.** Should be considered in terms of where agricultural products’ pricing is volatile and the associated impact on livelihoods.

• **Migrant workers are particularly vulnerable because of limited access to healthcare, discrimination, accommodation, visas and fear of reprisals.**

• **Going forward, as companies seek to identify new heightened risks, should consider 1) where state protections are limited, or were limited during Covid-19, 2) where governments have weakened labour laws in response to Covid-19, 3) where there is a prevalence of workers in the informal economy, 4) other groups in vulnerable situations such as migrant workers.**

**Country-specific risk factors – summary of presenters input:**
UK

- Rise in unemployment rate and benefit claims – last month’s figures showed unemployment figures have risen by 850,000 – figures not seen since the 1980s. This will increase vulnerability
- Victims have been transferred by exploiters from sectors such as car washes and nail bars into food production and agricultures as a result of COVID-19
- Anticipated increase in exploitation cases as labour market re-opens – future arrivals will be subject to quarantine (bar exceptions in areas such as agriculture). Quarantine raises concerns for people coming into the country to work – where will they be accommodated? How will they make money during this time?
- Those already vulnerable will continue to be vulnerable and situation enables exploiters to potentially increase control over victims of slavery
- Some vulnerable workers have been made homeless as a result of no work
- Workers are being threatened as they cannot earn money – individual’s debt bondage situation may worsen
- Modern Slavery and Police Transformation Unit believes construction, food processing and farms will be targeted for future exploitation and exploiters may look for new opportunities to exploit where new jobs roles are in place e.g. new cleaning roles
- Expected growth in number of illegitimate labour providers/recruitment channels – businesses being approached by organisations they have not heard from before. There has been very low uptake of GLAA temporary licensing scheme – 2 temporary licenses granted. [Note scheme was declared closed at the end of May].

Spain

- Closure of International borders is still on place, which has prevented migrant workers from arriving
- From the 7th April, Spanish government has implemented specific law – Royal Decree Law – to allow hiring of immigrants or jobless people in agriculture
- Labour shortages have opened up market for increase in vulnerability of workers in agriculture sector
- Spanish Labour Ministry is planning to have inspections to detect labour exploitation cases in the Agriculture sector in all the country.

South Africa

- Very high levels of unemployment in South Africa leading to increased worker vulnerability – businesses looking to shed 800,000-1 million jobs in the next year
- Restriction of movement of workers has created real challenges in sharing information with workers and challenges for workers having access to food and medical assistance, particularly where workers are living on farms
- Challenges continue in ensuring workers have access to adequate PPE and ensuring social distancing is maintained in workplace and in transportation
- Specific risks for migrant workers particularly irregular (undocumented) migrants who do not qualify for government support and cannot return home
- Limited operation of NGOs during lockdown to support victims.

United States

- Arrival of COVID-19 has reinforced criticality of farm workers whilst at the same time highlighting structural issues in the sector. During COVID-19 farmworkers have been categorized as “essential”, regardless of immigration status
Over half of all farm workers are undocumented – their legal status excludes them from government safety nets. They are also ageing.

As a result, there are labour shortages which means employers are looking increasingly to the H-2A visa programme to bring in labour. Department of State has continued to progress visas during COVID-19.

Farmers have needed to come up with COVID-19 prevention solutions, for example groups of employers have created a single isolation unit in case of outbreaks; some are keeping new H-2A arrivals separate from workers already in the country.

Inconsistencies in information have been a real challenge as state regulations vary widely from state to state and farm to farm. Information and two-way communication create better outcomes. Workers may be exposed to rumours and false information (for example, through social media) and have less access to official news channels. Methods of communication can include group Q&A sessions like small group tailgates, text messages, paycheck stuffers, and posting flyers in housing units, break rooms, etc.

**Thailand**

- Situation for undocumented migrant workers in Asia has been very challenging
- Testing of migrant workers travelling across borders has been limited which has raised fears of increased rates of infection between countries
- Mass returns from Thailand and Malaysia in April from Myanmar – there was no social distancing at the borders
- Migrant workers are at increased risk of exploitation in Thailand and Malaysia because of:
  - Health and safety issues
  - Lack of accurate information
  - Concerns about job stability
  - Concerns about work permits and border closures
  - Language barriers
- Workers returning home are vulnerable because of issues with documentation/ quarantining/ many do not know if they will be able to return to work/ many have been subject to a lot of discrimination.
- Workers investment in jobs in Thailand and Malaysia has generally been between $300-$1,000 so many are very concerned about the potential lack of work. Some workers may owe significant amounts of money paid as recruitment fees/ costs.
- Over 30,000 people are waiting to travel to Thailand from Myanmar who were offered jobs but have not been able to travel.

**Industry responses – summary of presenters input:**

- Businesses need to be doing a lot more than looking at the immediate red flags at this time to manage the risks of labour exploitation – as a result of COVID-19 some of the usual red flags are “blurred” e.g. restrictions on movement
- We should not be looking for the presence of abnormal, we should be looking for the “absence of normal” – victims are being coached, traffickers are one step ahead
- Need to look at preparing, preventing, protecting and pursuing victims
- Victims needs to be armed with the appropriate information – they need to know as much as possible about potential for exploitation and need to know what their rights are
- Current challenges businesses are seeing -
  - Risks associated with informal recruitment when demand is very high for example workers offering to bring in “friends of friends”
The impact of health and safety measures on the ability to monitor and detect exploitation e.g.

- **Reductions in physical security** during COVID for OSH purposes – may lead to “substitution slavery” where victims are sent in place of the person recruited
- **Workers are attending sites wearing PPE** which makes identity checks more challenging

- **Human rights due diligence checks** are being very challenged by levels of recruitment at this time – recruiters do not have the time to do the usual levels of due diligence
- **Increases in working hours to meet demand**, challenging whilst avoiding exploitation

**Methods adopted by businesses to manage risks:**

- **Site by site increases in worker engagement** - e.g. CEOs talking to workers more frequently through virtual meetings
- **Detailed conversations with suppliers** – avoiding health and safety conversations where suppliers are meeting legal requirements – focussing on communications with workers to ensure security – understanding workplace culture
- **Ensuring that supplier’s capacity and capability is understood** – there will be little you can do to manage supplier capacity during the crisis but you need to understand where human resource teams have the capacity to manage recruitment risks and on-site risks
- **Ensuring that suppliers have a “safe” relationship with a third-party organisation** to get support during the crisis. Suppliers need to feel safe in this relationship and need to be transparent about the problems they are facing
- **Being understanding that suppliers do not have space at the moment to talk about responsible recruitment processes** because Human Resource teams are overstretched

**Key things to consider:**

- **Perception of risk** is altered by the country you are in and the spread of COVID in that country – very important to understand local situation
- **Purchasing practices** need to be aligned with ethical considerations, for example it is very hard at the moment for suppliers to meet significant demand increases as well as managing working hours
- **Think about the long-term investments** required in increasing worker voice and grievance mechanisms and building supplier relationships and trust
- **Longer-term risks of exploitation will increase** – support from government is required to allow formal, controlled lower-skilled immigration into food and agriculture.

**What is the role of buyers in mitigation labour exploitation risks?**

- **At the root cause of forced labour and labour exploitation are business models, value distribution and purchasing practices**
- **There is therefore an opportunity post-COVID-19 to implement good practices which could reduce the likelihood of exploitation**
- **Businesses need to understand the specific needs of migrant workers:**
  - **Voice and visibility** – ensuring that all partners in the supply chain understand the situation of migrant workers and the impact on workers and jobseekers
  - **Cash** – transfers for exploited and stranded migrant workers to meet basic needs
  - **Remediation** – for workers who have lost jobs/ may not have been able to start work but have paid for a job
  - **Psychosocial support** – for workers and job seekers to make informed decisions
  - **Solidarity/ collective strength** – engagement between workers, businesses and support organisations at the destination workplaces and in origin communities.
- **Steps for businesses to consider include:**
• Purchasing practices –
  • How can good payment terms support suppliers and their cashflow?
  • Can you work with customers to amend technical specifications in order to reduce labour requirements?

• Health and safety practices –
  • At a minimum, ensuring that World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines on social distancing and occupational health and safety are being implemented in the workplace and where workers are accommodated
  • Avoiding cutting corners when demands increase

• Human resource practices –
  • How to ensure that workers are being paid wages on time?
  • Communication with workers to understand their vulnerabilities – including migrant workers and contract workers
  • Redundancy packages to support workers who are laid off

• Due diligence practices –
  • Avoiding paying third party labour providers unless you are confident they are reputable
  • Checking where temporary labour is being sourced from, continuing to apply due diligence at every stage

• Support and engagement –
  • Ensuring that workers and suppliers further down the supply chain understand the signs of modern slavery - engaging with third parties to provide training and support.

Final thoughts
• Key message to all players in the supply chain of a need to look at the root causes of labour exploitation
• Business may need to engage on the issues of formalisation of workers whether in their country of operations or in their supply chains
• Access to secure livelihoods/ decent work is going to be critical in the coming months to stop the increased potential for exploitation.

Guidance Links
Here are the links to guidance shared by our speakers during the webinar:
Issara Institute COVID-19 information - https://www.issarainstitute.org/
Staffline - #FeedtheNation campaign - https://feedthenation.co.uk/
Stronger Together UK site - https://www.stronger2gether.org/consumer-goods/
Stronger Together Spain Forced Labour Toolkit - https://www.stronger2gether.org/resources/?_sft_resource_country=spain&_sft_resource_type=toolkits
Stronger Together South Africa - https://www.stronger2gether.org/za/
**Webinar Poll Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: What function do you work in?</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Human Resources</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Technical</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Sustainability</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: Commercial</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: Other</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: Where have you seen the risks of labour exploitation increase since COVID-19?</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Direct recruitment into our sites/ farms</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Recruitment via formal, third party labour providers</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Recruitment via informal channels</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: We have not seen labour exploitation risks increase</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: Not to date but expect increased risks in next 3-6 months</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: What methods have been most for managing the risks of labour exploitation?</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Contracts and agreeing terms with labour providers</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Interviewing workers during recruitment and during employment</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Training all staff to understand labour exploitation</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: Ensuring you pay labour providers a fair price</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: Ensuring you pay workers a decent wage</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: Did you find this webinar useful?</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Q3:** Question to Stronger Together US – Could you comment on the impact of COVID-19 on how labour requirements in the sector are being filled and whether there has been an increase in the numbers of workers who are vulnerable to exploitation coming in to food processing and agriculture?

**Answer:**

The Stronger Together US program is focused exclusively on fresh produce. At this point in time, we do not have data that points to an increase in the numbers of workers who are vulnerable to exploitation in produce. However, there are a number of media reports that indicate that risks have increased for workers in meat processing. Local American workers are not taking up jobs in agriculture (again produce). The Department of State has continued to process H-2A visas which allows non-immigrant foreign workers to come to the U.S. to perform agricultural labour that is temporary and seasonal.

**Q4:** Question to Stronger Together US – Could you comment after your final slide on the potential long-term impacts on undocumented workers? In Spain and Italy for example, there have been increased calls for migrant workers to be regularised – are similar calls are being made in the US.

**Answer:**

Regularization is not an issue here. For the most part, the U.S. is governed by an “at will” employment scheme where anybody can walk away from a job at any time and an employer can terminate an employee without cause. We do not see this changing under the current administration.

**Q5:** Do workers arriving from EC countries to work at UK farms need to self-isolate for 14 days or not being key worker?

**Answer:**

1) UK government guidance published on the 22nd May includes seasonal workers in the categories who are exempt from quarantine requirements however they are expected to stay on farms once they arrive though they can mix with other workers – Exemptions from self-isolation requirements - “a seasonal agricultural worker who has an offer of employment for seasonal work to carry out specific activities in edible horticulture on a named farm. You can start work immediately but you must self-isolate on the farm. However, you may mix with fellow workers”


2) Best practice guidance developed by the UK government with support from industry about the arrival of new workers on site can be found on the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board website - https://ahdb.org.uk/coronavirus/social-distancing-farm-businesses

The slides for all the webinars can be accessed complete so far via these links:

- Managing Labour Responsibly Slides
- On-site health and safety management, accommodation and transport
- Furloughing Staff Responsibly and Managing Absence during the Crisis slides
- Economic impact of COVID-19 on businesses and workers – sick pay, social protection and longer-term provisions
- Engaging and supporting workers through anxious times (UK - 6th May 2020)
- Engaging and supporting workers through anxious times (Global - 7th May 2020)
- Coming out of lockdown – what businesses need to know
The recordings for all the webinars completed so far can be accessed via this link:

- Managing Labour Responsibly recording
- On-site health and safety management, accommodation and transport recording
- Furloughing Staff Responsibly and Managing Absence during the Crisis recording
- Economic impact of COVID-19 on businesses and workers - sick pay, social protection and longer-term provisions
- Engaging and supporting workers through anxious times – UK webinar recording
- Engaging and supporting workers through anxious times – Global webinar recording
- Coming out of lockdown – what businesses need to know recording

All of these can be shared with those that registered for the webinar as well as sponsors, suppliers, partners and colleagues.

If you would like to contact us, please email us on programmes@alliancehr.co.uk

Important Note: This is a summary of the information provided by the participants on the webinar and accessed via public sources. We seek to ensure that information is correct and up to date, however, as the situation is changing quickly, you are advised review this information in line with your national government guidance. The organisers and presenters exclude liability for any claim or loss alleged to have arisen from or in connection with use of the information provided.